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Statement submitted by Regards de Femmes, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Regards de Femmes has worked for 20 years in France and around the world to ensure that all environments, public and private, in both rural and urban areas, offer all women and girls security, equality, recognition and respect for their dignity. In these environments that foster autonomy and freedom, women and girls must be able to study, receive care, have access to justice, work and flourish in the company both of men and of other women.

Regards de Femmes works to ensure that every woman and girl has a legal identity, the most important human right of all, and so that women, regardless of marital status, can register the births of their children.

Providing civil registration for girls and women at all stages of their lives, especially birth and marriage, is indispensable for the full enjoyment of all of their rights.

As it strives to achieve real equality of rights, duties and dignity between men and women, including women with disabilities, Regards de Femmes and its partners base their work on the international conventions that States have signed and for which they are accountable to their peoples.

- Article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requires that States parties undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the Covenant.
- The articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women concerning economic and social rights, in particular article 10 on education, article 11 on the elimination of discrimination in employment, article 13 on other areas of economic and social life and article 14 to ensure women participate in and benefit from rural development.

Regards de Femmes works with

- The State and local Governments, for the provision of public services;
- Companies, to show the social and economic interest and prepare comparative reports;
- Women "supplementary family workers", particularly the wives and daughters of farmers, to share best practices so that their work is recognized and compensated.

Work with the State and local Governments

Social protection has supported and leveraged the economic empowerment of women, although their rights depended on their status as wives or mothers. We are now calling for those rights to be individualized, including in tax matters.

Current austerity policies have led to cutbacks in public services and social benefits.

Women suffer disproportionately from their effects, and social progress is undermined:

- The threat of losing acquired rights and/or of halting progress in the gains yet to be made so that existing formal rights can be effectively exercised.

- Social spending helps to offset economic and social inequalities between women and men. A decrease in such spending primarily affects women, who constitute the overwhelming majority of low-wage earners.

Women and girls living in rural areas do not have the same supply of or the same access to community services as women in urban areas. Their children also suffer owing to this shortage. In those rural areas, there are fewer women and girls than men and boys.

The number of available jobs; health services; public transport options; schools, from kindergarten to university; and cultural and sporting centres is much smaller and difficult to access where they do exist.

Rural girls have less access to sexual and reproductive health services. Even in those areas where contraception cards are available, it is more difficult for girls to obtain and use them.

Associations provide very little support in rural areas.

For ten years, Regards de Femmes has been committed to expanding the Parity Act in rural communes. The association organizes meetings to encourage rural women to stand as candidates in local elections and then to train them in carrying out their duties and to exchange best practices.

The involvement of women in local politics is contributing to the implementation of public programmes for the empowerment of women and girls, through access to sustainable infrastructure at the level of the commune or groups of communes, including extended school hours for the care of young students before and after compulsory school hours, childcare outside term time, intercommunal creches, collective school transport for students and assistance for employees towards the cost of travel between home and the workplace.

Local authorities must establish comparative reports and assessments of their professional gender equality policies. Such reports must also mention local policies implemented by the community or group to promote equality between women and men.

Local authorities must include a gender equality rule in terms of reference, along with the submission of a comparative activity report, in the conditions for the award and execution of public procurement contracts.

Work with businesses

The fact that companies, whether family run or multinational, public or private, have a social responsibility is obvious. In order to reduce gender inequalities, companies should apply the following criteria:

- Make remuneration policies more transparent;
- Do not permit any wage gap between women and men performing the same work with the same skillset;
- Ensure that training is given to both women and men;
- Properly acknowledge the women in the company;
- Put an end to messages that discriminate against women;
- Have a board of directors with at least 30 per cent of women and encourage the presence of men in equality policy circles, councils and observatories (HeforShe);

- Comply with the requirements of professional equality; implement an action plan to eliminate wage differences and differences in career development between women and men. Participation in public bidding processes requires demonstrating gender diversity in employment in many European countries.

- To allow men and women to participate equally in domestic work, it is necessary to alleviate the family constraints on women and men through flexi-time, parental leave, day-care centres and shared business concierge services.

Regards de Femmes organizes workshops to raise awareness in businesses of the importance of adapting working conditions in line with the foregoing criteria, to showcase good practices and to encourage enterprises to leverage them. Entrepreneurs, women and men, are committed to changing the role of companies with regard to their partners (employees, shareholders, suppliers and customers) and society as a whole (environment, land, consumers and public health).

Regards de femmes organizes international meetings to share local actions in different countries in order to improve the visibility, the collective voice and representation of women in small and medium-sized enterprises and in family agricultural enterprises.

Rural women make up nearly half the agricultural labour force around the world but they are predominantly unpaid family workers. Moreover, owing to patriarchal traditions, women remain unable to inherit or own land in many countries. As a result, they have no access to the loans or training they need to be able to become more productive. The lack of a legal identity adds to these challenges.

The support for rural women's empowerment provided by our partner, the National Organization for Children, Women and the Family of Côte d'Ivoire, is a model. Its actions have led to the promotion, defence, protection and respect for women's rights, improved their technical, material and financial capacities and increased their incomes.

Access to land, the factors of production, inheritance and participation in decision-making forums in the villages are some of the notable advances to be shared with our other partners in developing countries.